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U.S. Delegation
to the
SUB-COMMITTEE OF THE UN DISARMAMENT COMMISSION

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Governor Stassen
THRU: Mr. Matteson
FROM:
SUBJECT: Some Speculation Concerning the Soviet Position on Disarmament

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During my recent visit to Washington, I had an opportunity to talk to a number of intelligence analysts responsible for studying various important aspects of the Soviet Union. The following discussion is based on some ideas which do not necessarily represent agreed intelligence and in some cases are directly opposed to the formally agreed intelligence estimates. On the other hand, after talking with analysts whose judgment I respect, I feel that there is sufficient basis for advancing these ideas as a speculative hypothesis.

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It seems to me that the Soviet Union may be following a policy which might be called the policy of "the under-advertised deterrent". This policy might be described as a reliance on the public advocacy of peace, an attempt to reduce international tensions, an aggressive competition with the West in traditional rather than Communist channels, concentration on the long-term growth and development of the Soviet economic base, and a greater reliance on a nuclear deterrent with less emphasis on conventional military forces for protection and military power during the course of the economic build-up. It is possible that the Soviet Union might have arrived at this policy through the following logic:

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1. The Soviet position during the recent past when this policy might have been developed was more or less as follows: The Soviet Union was the second strongest nation that ever existed in the world. In fact, the Soviet Union had a tremendous economic and military power; from a purely military standpoint, the Soviet Union in 1955 had weapons and forces which might well have defeated the U.S., armed as it was in 1945. The Soviet Union could in no sense be called a weak country and had a remarkable history of dynamic growth in the recent past. There were, however, certain dark patches in this picture from the Soviet point of view.

(a) The Soviet Union had developed a nuclear deterrent but this deterrent was far smaller in absolute magnitude than that of the U.S., was probably smaller than the optimum desired by Soviet military leaders, and would probably remain smaller than that level for some years to come.

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- 2 -

(b) The Soviet conventional military forces were under considerable pressure from the Soviet economy which needed additional quantities of manpower for the industrial labor force and additional quantities of steel and other raw materials for use in investment in Soviet industry.

(c) NATO had been developed successfully, West Germany had become a member of NATO, had embarked on a rearmament program and was developing such a powerful economy that it well might rival or surpass the power position of the United Germany of 1940.

(d) Fourth countries were potentially capable of developing nuclear weapons of their own. A majority of these countries were opposed to the Soviet Union, but even those in the Soviet Bloc would pose a problem for the Soviet Union since the possession of nuclear weapons by an associated Communist state might give it an unwanted degree of independence of the Soviet Union.

(e) Soviet leadership was and still may be unsettled making it dangerous to rock the boat too much in international fields.

(f) The satellites have proven to be unreliable.

(g) Public opinion in the USSR, although not important to the degree it is in western countries, has become a factor to be considered to some extent in making Soviet policy.

2. As a result of the situation described above, the Soviet Union may have chosen something like the following objectives for their national policy:

(a) To reduce the possibility that Western military power might be used against the Soviet Union.

(b) To reduce the military burden carried by the Soviet economy permitting it to concentrate on economic investment and growth.

(c) To discourage or prevent fourth countries from acquiring nuclear weapons.

(d) To maintain the Soviet bargaining position by preserving essential military power and preventing the West from learning any weaknesses that might exist in that power.

3. The Soviet Union may have adopted the following policies in the field of disarmament as leading toward the attainment of the objectives described above:

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- 3 -

(a) Reduction of manpower and conventional armaments. This would help reduce international tensions and permit the Soviet Union to shift manpower and resources to non-military uses at less risk, while at the same time the USSR would still retain a substantial conventional military power.

(b) The adoption of an inspection zone in Europe. The most direct military threat to the Soviet Union lies in the European area since this area contains the main NATO bases and a fairly large proportion of the U.S. nuclear striking power. The Soviet Union might well like to find some way for neutralizing that portion of SAC not contained in the European area but may have felt that this goal was somewhat unrealistic and that it was more important to concentrate on the most immediate threat. The inspection zones in Europe would also help protect the Soviet Union against a rapidly growing Western Germany.

(c) Ban on the testing of nuclear weapons. As we have seen, the Soviet Union is so anxious to achieve this that they are willing to have inspection to enforce this provision inside of the Soviet Union even though the ban on tests would leave the Soviet Union behind the U.S. in the development of an efficient family of nuclear weapons. The Soviet Union probably adopted this policy because it felt that its nuclear capability was adequate as a deterrent even though it was not at maximum efficiency; that a test ban would in fact prevent fourth countries from developing a significant nuclear capability; that the inspection of a test ban would not reveal a significant amount of other information concerning the Soviet Union to the West; and that it was an excellent issue on which to make substantial propaganda gains.

4. Other issues generated in the course of the disarmament discussions create some serious problems for the Soviet Union in connection with its policies.

(a) Extensive inspection. Inspection of a large area in the industrially developed parts of the Soviet Union would give to the West a great deal of information which the Soviet Union has always guarded tightly and even more important from the Soviet standpoint, it might reveal weaknesses in the Soviet position which would reduce the strength of the Soviet bargaining position in world affairs.

(b) The nuclear cut-off. The U.S. and the USSR have agreed that it is not possible to detect the existence of previously manufactured stockpiles of nuclear weapons, and the Soviet Union recognizes that the U.S. will not give up its own nuclear striking power. Furthermore, the Soviet Union may wish to base its future military strategy more on its own nuclear capability and relatively less on conventional weapons. The USSR might be

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- 4 -

willng to stop production of nuclear weapons if it could be sure that nuclear weapons were actually eliminated from the arsenals of states, but since this is unrealistic at the present time, they probably feel that they must continue to build up their nuclear power until it reaches the optimum level from the Soviet standpoint. Although our information concerning their past production may be reasonably correct, we may not correctly assess the level which the Soviet Union feels that it must have in order to be safe. The Soviet Union may, therefore, feel that it is necessary to continue the manufacture of nuclear weapons for a number of years. There is also the possibility that the Soviet Union may have or have had certain technical difficulties in the manufacture of nuclear material and might feel that this would be confirmed by international inspection and that this, in turn, would have a seriously weakening effect on the Soviet power position in world affairs. The Soviet Union may also feel that the U.S. insistence on the cessation of the production of nuclear weapons is unrealistic since we have both agreed that previous production cannot be controlled and that the existence of a stockpile of nuclear weapons adequate to destroy the opponent makes it relatively immaterial whether or not additional weapons are manufactured in the future.

(c) Political conditions. Although the resolution of political difficulties may actually be desirable to the Soviet Union insofar as it helps to reduce international tensions, the Soviet Union appears to be somewhat concerned that we might use these as a means of frustrating agreed disarmament measures and they appear to be particularly concerned about the exact role that Germany plays in the U.S. mind in this connection. The Soviet Union appears to be determined to continue the division of Germany or to permit reunification only on grounds they would give the Soviet Union some guarantee against growing German power. The Soviet Union also seems to recognize that there are strong feelings in France and the UK in favor of a similar point of view. They are probably considerably more uncertain, however, concerning the US position. The USSR probably feels that it is under a certain amount of pressure to achieve some kind of agreement on Germany at this time, however, since Western Germany alone, allied to the West, is potentially more and more of a threat to the Soviet Union. In other words, the Russians may be anxious to counteract the power of Western Germany before it becomes too great.

5. Under the policy of the under-advertized deterrent, the Soviet Union has taken pains to see that the West is informed that the Soviet Union has a nuclear capability and the means of delivering it. On the other hand, the Soviet Union has talked peace and the reduction of tensions at great length and has passed up many opportunities to advertize the deterrent. Very few of their nuclear tests, for example, are given any publicity by the Soviet Union.

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- 5 -

It is very difficult to say exactly where Soviet Union would draw the line under this policy on some of the problems now at issue in the disarmament talks. At this point, however, I would be inclined to guess that the Soviet Union would resist agreement on a nuclear cut-off and would be willing to take almost any sort of moral commitment against the use of nuclear weapons in lieu of agreement on a cut-off. I would also guess that they would be willing to let the West have almost any sort of inspection to guarantee against surprise attack and to guarantee a cessation of testing so long as the inspection did not get into the Soviet nuclear system or into sensitive industrial areas. I would also guess that the Soviet Union would be willing to agree to the unification of Germany if the U.S. could prove that it did not intend to let any single political consideration frustrate the execution of disarmament measures and if some means could be found to guarantee the Soviet Union against a large-scale development of German military power. On the other hand, the Soviet Union may feel under such pressure as a result of the growing power of Western Germany that it may feel that it is necessary to drastically revise its policies if an agreement concerning Germany cannot be reached with the West. It is difficult to say at this point what the revised policy might be, but one alternative that is always open is a reversion to the emphasis on all kinds of military power and more hostile relations with the West.

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